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SUBJECT Interview with Admiral Stansfield Turner

LARRY KING: Our special guest tonight, a distinguished American, Admiral Stansfield Turner. Admiral Turner was former Director of the CIA in the Carter Administration. He was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford, was the President, the 36th President of the Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island, held the rank of Admiral and Commander-in-Chief of NATO's southern flank, with headquarters in Naples, Italy. Was appointed in the Carter Administration as Director of the CIA. Is presently in private business as a writer, lecturer, and consultant all around the United States. Is a member of the board of directors of such companies as Monsanto and Times Fiber Communications and the Amcon Group. And we'll meet Admiral Stansfield Turner in a moment.

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KING: We welcome to our microphones, it's a great honor to welcome to our microphones a distinguished American, as we said, the former Director of the CIA, Admiral Stansfield Turner.

I thank you very much for coming. It's a pleasure meeting you.

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: Good evening, Larry. Pleased to be with you here.

KING: How do you like private life?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I'm enjoying, particularly, being out from under the pressure of government routine. Not only is it a personal relief not to have lots of crises on your desk every day, but it gives you an opportunity to think and take a

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perspective on things that you've worked on all your life, but you've been so busy you sometimes lost sight of the woods -- the trees for the woods.

KING: There must be some sort of, for want of a better term, a kind of drying-out period, isn't it? Because you've always been in service of one kind of another, militarily, key top civilian post. And then suddenly having no basic responsibility for tomorrow morning has got to be a tough adjustment.

ADMIRAL TURNER: No, I didn't find it all that difficult. Once in a while I would pick up the newspaper and find there were six or seven international crises going on at once, and feel a little left out of things. You normally would have been in the middle of those and found them very exciting.

But I've found private life very interesting and it's kept me very busy. But as I say, I can measure my own pace a little bit more. And if I don't accomplish something tonight and I have to put it off till tomorrow, it's usually okay. Whereas I might be very embarrassed if I had to appear before a congressional committee or something tomorrow morning and I didn't do my homework tonight if I was in the government.

KING: Do you like the lecture circuit?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes, I enjoy that because it gets out to meet people, lots of different walks of life. You get good questions. It makes you stay on your toes and read what's going on and try to analyze what's happening around the world. It's a stimulating experience.

KING: Let's trace a little background. What took you to Annapolis in the first place? What made you go career Navy?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I don't think I really decided I was going to be a career officer, Larry, till about the time I made admiral. I kept thinking another couple of years and I'll get out. Really, that's about the way it happened.

I went to a private college in Massachusetts three months before Pearl Harbor. The war came along and I decided to join the Navy, and maybe it was best to do it right by going to Annapolis. And it looked like it was going to be a long war. I must say I don't think when I got out of Annapolis I thought I'd stay in the Navy more than the minimum time required.

KING: Why did you?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I was lucky and won a Rhodes

Scholarship, which the Navy let me take. And I was only six months out of Oxford when the Korean War came along. You couldn't, of course, quit the military, as a professional, when the country was at war. So that kept me in another few years.

Then I got a very exciting job here in Washington as a very young officer in the Pentagon doing relations between the Navy and the State Department. I really found that exciting, and almost left the Navy stay here and do something like that as a civilian.

KING: So it was circumstance and desire.

ADMIRAL TURNER: That's correct. And, you know, each time I thought it was the right opportunity to get out, something came along and I stayed in for one more time. And I really am pleased that I did.

KING: Are there many Rhodes Scholars out of the military academies?

ADMIRAL TURNER: There's a reasonable number. Much more out of West Point. Even more, I believe, out of the Air Force Academy than out of Annapolis, unfortunately, from my point of view. But we're very pleased Annapolis won a Rhodes Scholar in each of the last two years. We hadn't had any for quite a few years before that.

KING: Is that a worthy experience?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Oh, that's a super experience. It's super because the English educational system at Oxford and Cambridge is something that most universities in the world cannot afford. You have an individual tutor for your subject and you meet with him once a week. You write an essay for him. You read it, or he reads it and critiques it, and you have a one-on-one intellectual exchange for that hour. He then tells you, "Read these three books next week and write me an essay on this." It really is very stimulating.

KING: What was your subject?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Philosophy, politics and economics. It was at that time the only course at Oxford that let you explore several fields at once. It's quite a different approach over there. You take, generally, only one subject: theology, physics, mathematics, whatever it is. But they work into it a lot of history, a lot of philosophy, and so on. But you usually take only one basic theme. I happened to get this course that had three themes that knitted together.

KING: Able to use it in your life?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Interestingly, I talked with a young man yesterday about what was useful to me from Oxford, because he's going to Oxford. And I told him that even though he is a military officer, the most valuable part of the course for him was going to be the philosophy. At least that's what I found was most valuable. One would think I would have found the politics or the economics more interesting or useful.

The philosophy was a matter of logic and reasoning, how to approach problems rationally, how to look at the alternatives and size them up. And that's what most of life is really all about.

KING: Is it hard to separate logic from emotion?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Oh, yes.

KING: That may be the hardest.

ADMIRAL TURNER: It's very hard. But again, a good training in philosophy will let you do that. Because that's what happened in these tutorials. When you got emotional, the professor just sliced you up. You know, he tore your argument apart.

KING: Our guest is Admiral Stansfield Turner, former Director of the CIA. We will tell you that even though the interview is extensive, many Americans are beginning to call in already. If you would like to join them, you can do that by dialing area code 703-685-2177.

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KING: Our guest is Admiral Stansfield Turner, former Director of the CIA. He was also, as Admiral, Commander-in-Chief of NATO's southern flank, headquartered in Naples, Italy; and was appointed by President Carter to his last post. He's now in private enterprise, is a lecturer and writer and consultant to companies, on the board of directors of many companies.

What is the Naval War College, that you were president of? What is that?

ADMIRAL TURNER: It's an institution for what I call mid-career education, Larry. In business, in education itself, in the military, you need to refresh people in midstream. You also need to take people who have been focused into a narrow part of their profession, whether it's medicine or whether it's manufacturing or sales, or whatever, and you need to expand their

horizons, because they're going up to the top of their companies and they have to be able to cover lots of topics, not just manufacturing or marketing or advertising, or gunnery or submarines, or whatever.

And so we attempt, in a nine-month period, to broaden the officer's outlook, to make him a prospective admiral, to study parts of his profession that he's just been too busy to get into.

KING: Is it required?

ADMIRAL TURNER: No, it is not required. The Army almost requires it for officers to get promoted to general. The Air Force comes a little closer. I'm sorry to say the Navy doesn't put as much emphasis on education as do the other two services.

KING: Why does it have so, forgive me, harsh a word as War College? It sounds like you're in there blowing up games.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, you do have in part of the course those questions of tactics, of military procedures in order to win wars. But the end objective of any military organization is to keep the peace, hopefully, by not having to fight. And in the War College, we do teach the strategy, the reasons for having a military, and when you want to fight and when you prefer not to.

KING: During your naval career, did you know Jimmy Carter at all?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Not very much. We were classmates at the Naval Academy, knew each other just a little bit there.

When I went to the War College, Larry, was the time I made contact with Jimmy Carter.

KING: Was he there as a student?

ADMIRAL TURNER: No, no. No, he was the Governor of Georgia at that time. And I was running a program up there to help broaden the outlook of the officers, so I invited Jimmy Carter to come up and give them a talk one time. Subsequently, I happened to be in Atlanta on business and I called on him in his office there. He told me as I left that interview that in two days he was going to announce his candidacy for the presidency. And I wished him good luck, and sort of laughed to myself and thought, "He's not likely to make that, I don't think." And little did I know how much his making it would change my life.

KING: Do you remember him well at Annapolis at all?

ADMIRAL TURNER: No, we didn't know each other that well there.

KING: Was he a good naval student?

ADMIRAL TURNER: He came out number 52, or something, in a class of 832, which is fine.

KING: Not too bad.

What was the post of Commander-in-Chief of NATO's southern flank? Will you explain that?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, General Haig, when he was my boss there, was the head of all of European NATO, and he had three subordinate commanders, one who had his northern flank, which was Denmark and Norway; one who had the center area, which is Holland and Belgium and Germany; and then I had the southern end, which was Turkey, Greece, Italy, and the Mediterranean Sea.

So, my job was, in time of war, when those countries committed their forces to NATO, to command the armies, the air forces and the navies of those three countries, and the United States and British contributions, primarily through their navies, to that area of NATO.

KING: So you commanded all areas of the south.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes.

KING: Is there a NATO navy?

ADMIRAL TURNER: No, there's not a NATO navy, with one or two small exceptions. NATO has a force of a few destroyers that work together, some from different countries, all the time. It's a permanent force. That's a very small part of it, though. The real thing is that in the Mediterranean, for instance, as the NATO commander, several times a year I would conduct exercises in which we tried to get the Greek, Turkish, Italian, and American, sometimes the French, and British navies all to come out and exercise together. They were, in a sense, one navy at that point, a NATO navy. But they all, of course, flew their individual flags, they had their own officers and men, they had their own procedures. But we tried to make common those procedures enough so that they could work together very effectively. And I think that does work well.

KING: You know, I guess we get sort of lax and we hardly ever think that the NATO countries are ever going to be attacked. I guess that's sort of remote. Is it tough to -- in NATO, to keep on your toes, so to speak, since the threat against

NATO, at least in this period in world history, doesn't seem imminent?

ADMIRAL TURNER: There are problems there. There are problems in keeping the Europeans, sometimes, serious about these activities, these maneuvers, and such forth. And yet, the real threat to NATO today, Larry, is the danger that people will come to perceive the Soviets and their allies have such a military advantage that NATO will become what they call Finlandized. It will begin to make concessions because they're afraid that they're outpowered. Not that they really think the Soviets are going to invade...

KING: Do you fear that?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I do fear that. I don't think we're quite there yet, but I think we're at a turning point, where if we can't induce our European allies to do more to contribute to their own defense over there, they could become Finlandized.

KING: How did you -- did you expect the appointment as Director of the CIA?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I was sitting in that office in Naples, blissfully unaware that anybody was thinking about that, when I received a phone call one day, said, "The President would like to see you in Washington tomorrow morning." It was four o'clock in the afternoon in Naples. And somehow I got to Washington by the next morning.

KING: What did you think on the flight over?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I assumed that he was going to move me to some different military slot, or maybe he'd just interview me to see if he liked me for any different position in the military.

Interestingly, I was told to go see the Secretary of Defense, Harold Brown, in the morning. I went to see him. And he just chit-chatted with me for about five minutes. I'd never met him, and we just got to know each other. And he said, "Well, the President has something he wants you to do. Go across to the White House and see him."

Well, as soon as I walked out of Mr. Brown's office, I said to myself, "I'm not going to a military assignment. He didn't even really try to interrogate me or see what kind of a person I was." And he certainly would if I was going to be one of his principal officers. So I had to think on my feet, or maybe I thought in the car on the way across the river from the Pentagon to the White House what I was going to say when the President said, "Will you take the CIA?"

KING: And you said yes.

ADMIRAL TURNER: No, I never did say yes, I don't think. I told him I would prefer to stay in the military, and thought that I could serve him better, having prepared my life for 31 years in that direction. He told me that he thought I could serve him and the country better by taking this. And I think I just sort of numbly acceded.

KING: Was it hard to resign your commission?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I didn't actually have to resign initially. The law provides the Director of Central Intelligence may be an active-duty military officer.

KING: Oh, really?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Or a retired officer or a civilian. And I think in order, perhaps, to persuade me to, in effect, forsake my military career, the President said he wanted me to stay on active duty. And so I did, for the first two years, anyway. And at the end of that, I thought that wasn't necessary and it wasn't a good idea, and I clearly wasn't going back to the military, nor did I want to go back at that point. And I retired and went onto the civilian rolls for the last two years.

KING: Did that mean that while you were Director of the CIA, a higher-up could have ordered you to go on maneuvers for two weeks in the summer?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Not quite. And it's very interesting you raise that, because the law itself provides that if you are on active duty as the Director of the CIA, that you may not respond to military direction and you may not play a role in it. It wants to be sure there's a separation there.

KING: A little Catch-22, right? You're in but you're not in.

ADMIRAL TURNER: That's right. Really, it's very -- that's why I finally decided to resign.

KING: Had you had a lot of intelligence experience?

ADMIRAL TURNER: None. I mean I'd never...

KING: When he told you this is the job, did he tell you why you suited this job for him?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes. He described what he thought were my contributions to the military or to the country over the years

and why he thought I was the right caliber of person for this. And that's when I said to him, "Mr. President, if I really do have the qualities that you've been so kind as to attribute to me, I think you need those qualities and that kind of a person in the military today. I think we have a lot of problems in our military and that I could better serve you there because that's what I've prepared for over the years. You're very generous, but I think I can help you better there."

KING: And he thought otherwise.

ADMIRAL TURNER: And I sat there rather numb as he kept saying, "I want you in the CIA."

KING: Was it a lot to do with your organizational ability, as well?

ADMIRAL TURNER: It may have been. I'm not sure. You know, in 1977, when he asked me to do that, the CIA, in particular, our intelligence community, in general, was in rather bad repute in this country. The media had overplayed some genuine criticism that was deserved, some errors that had been made. And I know the President wanted to be sure those errors did not happen again. But he was also very supportive of having good intelligence. And I think he wanted to be sure that he had somebody in the job he thought could make the transition from rather little control and regulation to some kind of regular order.

KING: It makes sense.

We'll be right back with Admiral Stansfield Turner, former Director of the CIA.

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KING: He is now a consultant, lecturer, writer. He is the former Director of the CIA and the former admiral and Commander-in-Chief of NATO's southern flank, headquartered in Naples, a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford. He's Admiral Stansfield Turner....

How, Admiral -- and this boggles the mind -- how do we measure how effective an intelligence agency is, since, by its nature, it is secretive? So how do we know that the Mossad of Israel is a great intelligence agency? And how do we know that Britain's M-5, or whatever it is, or the CIA -- how do we know that maybe the intelligence agency in Italy might not be superior to the -- I mean how do we know? How do you measure it?

ADMIRAL TURNER: That's a very tough one. You do have

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to keep the basic things you do in intelligence secret.

Clearly, when countries get caught out, you have to worry that there's been some kind of an intelligence shortcoming.

On the other hand, we often judge getting caught out on the basis of short-term predictions rather than long-term. You know, you don't predict every coup, every assassination, every change of government. No agency, intelligence agency is going to have a high batting average at that. What you want to do is predict the long-term trends. Your politicians can do something about that. They probably can't do much if there's going to be a coup tomorrow afternoon in some country.

And it's hard for the public to know whether the intelligence agencies are in fact predicting the long-term trends, because they don't come out and do it publicly. And even if they did, it probably wouldn't get much attention, because it's too far away for the.

KING: Among the professionals, how do you measure it? You know, if you were to gather with the head of all the agencies, what would be your yardstick?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, of course, when you talk about friendly countries, we have a reasonable exchange of information. Very private, but a good exchange with the principal allies in Europe and in the Pacific. And it's not hard to tell whether their opinions about what's going to happen in some third country are sensible. And so you judge them because you sit down with their chief of intelligence and you say, "I think down in Zambia in Africa things are going this way." And he says, "Oh, they are?" And you realize he isn't up to date on that country.

So what you find, really, Larry, is that only the Soviet Union and the United States have complete intelligence services. We are the only ones, for instance, with satellites. We are the only ones who attempt to do a really full worldwide coverage. We're the only ones who can afford that.

KING: Yeah.

ADMIRAL TURNER: So other intelligence organizations may be excellent with their limited sphere. So you probe until you find out. Country X, a friend of yours, it knows a lot about Countries Y, Z, A, B, and D, but it doesn't know much about R, P, and Q. You see what I mean? So you deal with them in those terms.

KING: What was the morale like when you got there?

ADMIRAL TURNER: The morale was, of course, hurt by the

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intense public criticism of 1975 and '76, during all of the investigations. I think there's been a lot of overplay on how bad the morale was. I always say to people, "If I ever have to again command an organization that's supposed to have bad morale, let me have the CIA, because they work like troupers even if their morale is bad."

What it did, though, worse than morale, the criticism, it made the people in the CIA cautious. They were conscientious. They didn't want to get the CIA in trouble again. You see what I mean? And intelligence is a risk-taking business. That's the whole essence of intelligence: what risk will you take in order to get what information?

Well, if they hunker down and don't want to take too many risks because they'll bring on more criticism, then you're not going to have good intelligence.

KING: Philosophically, Admiral, do you support the concept that if agents can effectively change a government we don't like, they should do that?

ADMIRAL TURNER: That philosophically all right, but only when that it is duly authorized by the political authorities of our country. The CIA has never done that without it being authorized. And today we have a very thorough set of checks and controls to insure that the CIA, or any other intelligence organization in the country, doesn't even move in that direction without authorization of the President of the United States, not just anybody. And we are also required by law to notify the Congress that we're moving in that direction.

So, it's well under controls.

KING: Mr. Reagan would change it somewhat. There are thoughts of permitting the CIA to do work inside this country, something that some call abominable. I think that was the term you used in a letter to someone, that the CIA should never act inside this country at all, that's not what it's chartered to do.

How do you feel?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I am much more with Mr. Truman than Mr. Reagan. I admire the fact that Mr. Reagan relaxed those rules, in the spirit of trying to help the Central Intelligence Agency. I think it will hurt more than it will help.

KING: Why?

ADMIRAL TURNER: First, the one thing the CIA cannot stand is another series of criticisms like 1975-76. I think that

would do it almost irreparable harm, in terms of the personnel and their willingness to stay and the young people to come in, and so on.

If you turn the CIA loose to do clandestine spying against Americans, they have to do it within the restraints of law. No question about that. But they're not trained to do that. They're trained to operate outside this country, where our laws do not apply.

Now, the FBI is trained to operate within the law. An FBI agent's first reaction when you give him a new job is, "What are the limits of what I can do here?"

So, the answer is to let the FBI do that clandestine work when it's necessary and authorized, and then provide the information to the CIA.

KING: Did you change somewhat the cleavage that had occurred between the two agencies?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I don't want to take too much credit for that because that healing had started before my time. But I did work very hard to insure there was a close coordination. I was very lucky and grateful that when Clarence Kelley, who was the Director of the FBI when I arrived, decided to retire a year later, the President called on Judge Bill Webster. Well, Bill Webster and I had been at college in 1941, as I mentioned to you earlier, just before Pearl Harbor, together and we had been friends for all those years. So it was very easy to work with Bill. And he's a super person and was most cooperative.

One day I happened to have dinner with a person I didn't know in the FBI. I met him for the first time. And in the course of dinner he turned to me and he said, "You know, Admiral, when we found out down at the working level in the FBI and at the CIA that you and Judge Webster were playing tennis together regularly, we decided we'd better get along."

KING: We'll be right back with Admiral Stansfield Turner, former Director of the CIA, distinguished military career, an incredible academic career.

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KING: Our guest is Admiral Stansfield Turner. We will go to your calls at the top of the hour. Admiral Turner is now a lecturer, writer and consultant, appeared recently on one of the networks regularly during the Falkland crisis.

How did that come about?

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ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, they asked me twice to be on the Today Show about the Falklands. And after the second time, they called me up and said, "We'd just as soon you not skip to the other networks. And so would you like a contract?"

KING: And they paid you as a consultant.

ADMIRAL TURNER: And so they put me on the payroll for a couple of months.

KING: By the way, having watched you, you forecast that almost on the button.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, thank you. That was a lot of fun to do. It was a fascinating war. One doesn't like to think of wars in that term because there was so much unnecessary killing and death in that war, which I think the whole war was unnecessary. But if you had to have a war, it was sort of a microscopic view of what might happen in a bigger war, and lots of lessons to be learned, the principal one of which, to me, is that navies have got to be able to control the seas that they operate on. You can't do anything else unless you can do that. And the whole war of the Falklands was just a question of could the British Navy stay afloat down there against the Argentine opposition? Because once the British Navy had cut the Argentines off from getting to the islands, there was no question Britain was going to win if they could maintain that blockade of the sea and of the air lines to the Falklands. And the only real issue was, could those Argentine Air Force planes, and maybe the submarines, which never did show up, do enough damage to the British Navy to drive them away?

KING: In retrospect, do you think Argentina thought they would not come, or that Argentina thought they would win if they did come?

ADMIRAL TURNER: The former. I don't believe they thought Britain would come that far for that little.

KING: Admiral, before we get back to the CIA, I know you have also discussed on television and made a speech recently concerning the Israel move into Lebanon.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Uh-huh.

KING: First, is Israel, as has been stated, do you think they're the third strongest army in the world today?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I think they may be the third best army.

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KING: Best army.

ADMIRAL TURNER: But, you know,...

KING: Their numbers...

ADMIRAL TURNER: ...they're small. So it would be pretty hard to...

KING: You criticized them, did you not, as I read that speech, on going too far? Did you say they were going too far, or they got hesitant after they went? I'm trying to remember.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Larry, it wasn't a question of being critical. I think the time has come now to ask ourselves, what's going to be best for Israel and what's going to be best for our Arab friends and what's going to be best for the United States in the Middle East?

Mr. Begin recently said the action in Lebanon has brought 40 years of peace to the Middle East. I'm not so sure he's right. And I'm worried if Israel operates on that assumption. Because if they really believe they've brought 40 years of peace, they don't have to now accommodate to the Palestinians and try to make friendship and peace in a prolonged basis with the Arab world.

You see, when a country has overwhelming military power and then can't really fully utilize it, as we did not in Vietnam, and as they did not before West Beirut, the enemy says, "Wait a minute. What's holding them back?" The Vietnamese took advantage of us and beat us in Vietnam because we couldn't turn loose. Here, if the Arabs look at it, they'll say to themselves, "Israel's weakness is she can't take a lot of personnel casualties." She's got a small population. And she also has a small economic base and a lot of economic problems. "What are my," the Arab, "advantages over Israel?"

The only ones, really, are, "I've got a lot of people, and they're willing to die for the cause. And secondly, I've got a lot of money."

So, Israel has got to be concerned whether over the next decade -- I don't mean tomorrow or next year -- the Arabs may just try to wear them down.

KING: Do you think that she could -- she tried to go in and did not? She feared greater losses if she did go in?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, she feared several things, but one of them was high casualties to her personnel. They were concerned -- in this war, her casualty figures in the -- not casualties, but fatalities in the low three hundreds. In the last

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major war, in 1973, they had over 2800 fatalities. That shook the country enough that the politicians were nervous about as low figures as 300. I hate to say low because it's human lives.

[Technical difficulties]